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Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination
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Agenda items 4-8 and 10-13*

Implementation of the system of National Accounts, 1993 (1993 SNA)

Work of the Inter-Agency Task Forces

Some critical problems in economic statistics

Demographic, social and migration statistics

Statistical implications of the follow-up to recent major United Nations conferences

Technical cooperation in statistics

Coordination of statistical data-collection activities

Information on the statistical activities of the international organizations

Role and functioning of the Statistical Commission

Actions and decisions taken by the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities at its thirty-first session

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report contains the actions and decisions taken by the Subcommittee at its thirty-first session (Geneva, 16-18 September 1997), and is made available in response to the request of the Working Group at its seventeenth session (E/CN.3/1995/2, para. 34).

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I. Introduction

1. The ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities held its thirty-first session at Geneva from 16 to 18 September 1997. Actions and decisions taken at the session are listed below; the list of participants is contained in the annex.

II. Matters arising from the thirtieth session of the Subcommittee

Policy on provision of copies to other organizations of methodological publications in more than one language, where available

2. The Subcommittee endorsed the recommendation of the Bureau that each organization should also provide one free copy of any available language version of their statistical methodological publications to other members of the Subcommittee on request (see SA/1997/2, para. 2), and requested organizations to take steps so that other organizations could become aware of the availability of new methodological publications, for example by placing release information on their home pages.

Further development of the coordination tools and how to make them available

3. The Subcommittee endorsed the decision of the Bureau to retain the inventory of statistical data-collection activities (a machine-readable database) but not to spend resources on further updating or further developing it or the other coordination tools (the list of classifications used in statistics, the inventory of computerized statistical databases and the annotated list of methodological publications). Instead, the Bureau decided it was preferable to spend resources on the development of an integrated presentation of the work programmes of the members of the Subcommittee, which was expected to be a significant coordination tool itself (see SA/1997/3, para. 3).

Coordination issues arising from implementation of the International Monetary Fund Special Data Dissemination Standard, development of the Fund's General Data Dissemination System, and the Common Code of Statistical Practice in the United Nations system

4. The Subcommittee noted the Bureau's conclusion that in those areas there were no coordination issues to be considered by the ACC Subcommittee at large (see SA/1997/3, para. 5). The Subcommittee further noted that the Bureau had held its meeting prior to additional information becoming available about the International Monetary Funds' General Data Dissemination System. The Subcommittee agreed that although no coordination issues needed to be considered at the thirty-first session, the Subcommittee would address such issues if they arose in the future.

2000 Population and Housing Census Programme

5. The Subcommittee noted that the provisional principles and recommendations for population and housing censuses (PROV/ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/67/Rev.1) had been approved by the Statistical Commission,[1] had been amended by the United Nations Statistics Division as directed by the Statistical Commission, and had been submitted for editing, translation and printing. The Subcommittee also noted that the International Labour Organization (ILO) was completing a separate publication on economic characteristics of the population.

Migration statistics

6. The Subcommittee noted that the draft revised recommendations on statistics of internal migration (PROV/ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/58/Rev.1) had been approved by the Statistical Commission[2] and were being amended by the United Nations Statistics Division as directed by the Commission.

Communication by e-mail

7. The Subcommittee agreed that the electronic distribution of documents for the thirty-first session by e-mail, as well as the installation of session documents on a special ACC Subcommittee World Wide Web home page, had been a successful experiment and had met the needs of the Subcommittee in respect of document distribution; the Subcommittee agreed that that practice should be continued for future meetings.

General issues related to the work of the task forces

8. The Subcommittee noted that the Statistical Commission had reviewed a report on assessment of the work of the inter-agency task forces established by the Statistical Commission in relation to their mandates (E/CN.3/1997/24 and Corr.1), and had established a group to explore new approaches to the structure and operation of the Statistical Commission.[3] The Subcommittee also noted that the draft report of that group, including observations on the functioning of the task forces, would be considered under the item "Matters arising from the work of the Statistical Commission and its Working Group: other matters" (see para. 23 below).

Statistical support for policy analysis issues at the international level

9. The Subcommittee noted that the basic issue of concern was the coordination of collection of statistical data from countries. The Subcommittee agreed to the proposal that the United Nations Statistics Division (a) should await responses from countries to an invitation, extended by the Chairman of the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination, requesting countries to report on actual cases of duplication that they had experienced, and (b) should subsequently prepare a report for the Subcommittee along the lines specified by the Subcommittee at its thirtieth session (see ACC/1996/9, para. 29).

World statistics day

10. The Subcommittee noted that the Statistical Commission (a) had expressed support for the holding of national and regional statistical days in those countries and regions that already held such days, and had encouraged the holding of national statistical days in any countries that might wish to establish such days, and (b) had found no consensus in favour of holding a world statistics day.[4]

Provisional agenda and documentation for the thirtieth session of the Statistical Commission

11. The Subcommittee noted that the agenda and documentation had been finalized to reflect inputs from members of the Subcommittee.

III. Technical cooperation

12. The Subcommittee noted that the informal group established by the Statistical Commission to follow up a proposal on holding a seminar/symposium on good practices related to technical cooperation[5] had met twice. The group would prepare a report on general good practices in technical cooperation in statistics, which would be (a) circulated to central statistical organizations and regional organizations, (b) discussed informally in a wide range of forums, and (c) submitted to the Statistical Commission's Working Group in February 1998.

IV. Issues related to the work of the task forces

Task Force on International Trade Statistics

13. The Subcommittee welcomed the report of the Task Force, noted its achievements, and requested it to investigate the issue of inconsistency between the reported imports and reported exports of trading partners.

Task Force on Environment Statistics

14. The Subcommittee considered that there was a special need for coordination in this area of statistics, and requested the Bureau to prepare for a session on this topic at the thirty-second session of the Subcommittee.

Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts

15. The Subcommittee recognized the concern of the regional commissions that countries would have difficulty with the new national accounts data questionnaire to be implemented in 1999, and would look to the regional commissions for help. The Subcommittee noted that the United Nations Statistics Division would work with the regional commissions to help them prepare to deal with that development.

Task Force on Finance Statistics

16. The Subcommittee endorsed the extension of the terms of reference, as proposed by the Task Force in response to a request of the Statistical Commission[6] to include reporting, on a periodic basis, on the work programmes of international organizations—including, as appropriate, regional organizations—as they related to the development and maintenance of methodologies and compilation guides, the compilation, processing and dissemination of such material, and technical assistance and cooperation in the field of finance statistics (see SA/1997/8/Add.3, para. 13). The Subcommittee agreed that that extension would be subject to review at a later stage if work programmes were to be reported on through a different process, such as the planned integrated presentation of work programmes.

Task Force on Industrial and Construction Statistics

17. The Subcommittee noted that the Statistical Commission had agreed that the Task Force had largely accomplished its goals and should be discontinued.[7] However, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) was continuing its commitment to investigate definitions of statistical units used by its member countries, and would report thereon to the Statistical Commission's Working Group.

Task Force on Services Statistics

18. The Subcommittee noted the progress of work on the manual on trade in services statistics, and endorsed the Task Force's proposal to change its name to the Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services (see SA/1997/8/Add.5, para. 7) so as to more accurately reflect its current mandate, which focused on problems related to the collection of data on international trade in services.

V. The Statistics part of the ACC Programme Classification

19. The subcommittee concluded that additional attentions should be directed to defining the purpose(s) to be served by such a classification since such definition would influence its structure and details; in particular, the requirements to be established for the proposed integrated presentation of work programmes (see para. 25 below) would be important. The Subcommittee requested organizations to send comments on a note by the ILO on the statistics part of the ACC Programme Classification (SA/1997/5) to the ILO, and requested the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the ILO and the International Statistical Institute (ISI) to prepare a revised report for the thirty-second session of the Subcommittee based on any such comments as well as on comments made during the discussion.

VI. Coordination of the follow-up to the statistical implications of recent major United Nations conferences, including the coordination mechanisms that ACC has put in place

20. The Subcommittee welcomed (a) the work being done on promotion and implementation of the Minimum National Social Data Set (MNSDS), as well as the support that individual organizations were giving it in their work; (b) the ongoing work on poverty statistics and its dissemination on the World Wide Web pages of the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografica y Estadisticos (IBGE) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); (c) the work at OECD on the development of a core set of indicators for monitoring progress towards widely shared development goals; and (d) proposals on a core set of indicators associated with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). The Subcommittee invited its members to provide the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) with any comments on the core set of UNDAF indicators.

21. The Subcommittee reviewed a request from the United Nations Statistics Division to provide data for inclusion in an inventory of all indicators produced in the United Nations system, which the ACC Task Force on an Enabling Environment for Economic and Social Development had requested the Division to develop. Some members of the Subcommittee considered that such an inventory could be useful. However, the Subcommittee (a) expressed doubts that the inventory would be used; (b) expressed concerns about several definitional aspects of what should be included and the input required to set up the initial inventory and to maintain it; and (c) requested the Division to investigate how the existing inventory of statistical data collection activities, if well developed and maintained, might be used to meet the perceived needs in place of the proposed new inventory.

VII. Some critical problems in economic statistics and the role of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities in ad hoc Voorburg-type groups

22. The Subcommittee discussed aspects of the city groups, including the various ways in which they choose to function, how they determined their memberships and how they adopted their work programmes. The Subcommittee welcomed the steps that the United Nations Statistics Division had taken to expand knowledge at the national level of the existence and functioning of the groups. The Subcommittee agreed that members of the Subcommittee had a role to play within the city groups, particularly to reflect the views of non-participating countries.

VIII. Matters arising from the work of the Statistical Commission and its Working Group: other matters

23. The Subcommittee noted the work on international economic and social classifications. It also took note of a draft report entitled "Begeer and beyond: some additional steps towards more effective international statistical cooperation" which had been prepared by an informal group established by the Statistical Commission. The Subcommittee decided that it did not need to take a position in relation to the draft report, but invited members to send any comments that they might have directly to the Convener of the group.

IX. Functioning of the Subcommittee

24. The Subcommittee considered a brief proposal, put forward by the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) in a letter dated 8 September 1997 to the Chairman of the Subcommittee, that since the concept of the Subcommittee's Bureau had been established, it could fulfil the requirements of the global system, supplemented by short "plenary" sessions held at the same time as Statistical Commission/Working Group meetings and permanent contact by e-mail among Subcommittee members. The Subcommittee considered that the reforms that it had instituted in recent years had resulted in improved coordination, more effective and efficient meetings, and improved attention to the business of the Subcommittee in-between sessions by the Bureau. Although the specific brief proposal was not supported, the Subcommittee agreed that it should make its agenda/meetings more substantive on major issues when they arose, and that the Bureau should contribute to that goal by making appropriate preparations for discussions. The Subcommittee recalled that that was its intention in relation to the consideration of environment statistics at its thirty-second session.

X. Information on statistical programmes

25. The Subcommittee considered a proposal that had been developed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United Nations Statistics Division to meet a request by the Statistical Commission for information on the work programmes in statistics of the international organizations,[8] particularly on activities and meetings. The proposal was presented, in part, through an on-line demonstration of access to a Statistics Division World Wide Web home page that had been developed for that purpose. The Subcommittee recognized the value of that kind of product for guiding the Statistical Commission and other interested parties into the statistical activities and meetings of the international organizations, but some members expressed reluctance to commit resources to input the data required for that kind of reporting, particularly in cases where they might have provided the same or similar data in another format for other reporting purposes. However, there was a general consensus to participate if a pilot study showed that it could be done with reasonable resource input. Consequently, the Subcommittee agreed that the proposal should be further developed through a pilot effort, and requested the United

Nations Statistics Division, the ILO, IMF and the World Bank to participate.

XI. United Nations Economic and Social Information System

26. The Subcommittee took note of the intentions of the United Nations Statistics Division concerning standards for data structure and meta-data in international data exchange and dissemination in the context of the United Nations Economic and Social Information System.

XII. ACC Subcommittee on Demographic Estimates and Projections

27. The Subcommittee on Statistical Activities endorsed the decision of the Bureau in which the Bureau welcomed the decision of the Subcommittee on Demographic Estimates and Projections (SCDEP) to invite as observers organizations whose work was relevant to that of SCDEP, and noted that Eurostat and the International Organization for Migration would be invited to attend the twentieth session of SCDEP in 1998 (see SA/1997/3, para. 8).

XIII. Chairmanship and the Bureau of the Subcommittee

28. The Subcommittee:

(a) Elected G. Jones of UNICEF as Chairman of the Subcommittee, with effect from the beginning of the thirty-second session in 1998;

(b) Decided that immediately following the thirty-first session, the Bureau should comprise:

H. Habermann (United Nations Statistics Division ; ex officio) (Term: permanent)

J.-M. Leger (WTO)(Term ends 1999)[9]

F. Mehran (ILO; Chairman)(Term ends 1998)

A. Flatt (ESCAP) (Term ends 1998)

G. Jones (UNICEF; Chairman elect) (Term ends 2000)

(c) Requested that R. Roberts of the United Nations Statistics Division continue to serve as Secretary of both the Subcommittee and the Bureau.

XIV. Dates, venue and agenda of the thirty-second session

29. The Subcommittee recommended that its thirty-second session be held from 16 to 18 June 1998 at United Nations Headquarters in New York, and requested the Bureau to develop a proposal for the Subcommittee in relation to the timing and venues of future meetings. The provisional agenda—subject to review and finalization by the Bureau—was agreed as follows:

1. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
2. Adoption of the report of the thirty-first session.
3. Matters arising from the thirty-first session of the Subcommittee (reports of the Bureau on its inter-sessional meetings; note by the Secretariat on follow-up to the thirty-first session).
4. Classification of statistics and statistical activities (report by ESCAP, the ILO and ISI).
5. Environment statistics (report by the Task Force on Environment Statistics).
6. Reporting on international statistical activities to the Statistical Commission (report by the United Nations Statistics Division, the ILO, IMF and the World Bank).
7. Issues related to the work of the task forces (reports by the task forces).
8. Coordination of the follow-up to the statistical implications of recent major United Nations conferences (report by the United Nations Statistics Division).
9. Coordination of statistical data-collection activities (report by the United Nations Statistics Division).
10. Other matters relating to the Statistical Commission and its Working Group (report by the United Nations Statistics Division).
11. ACC Subcommittee on Demographic Estimates and Projections.
12. Bureau of the Subcommittee.
13. Dates, venue and agenda of the thirty-third session of the Subcommittee.

XV. Special topic: preparing budget proposals related to statistical activities in the United Nations system

30. The Subcommittee welcomed a presentation on the subject made by Mr. P. Leslie, Secretary of the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (Financial and Budgetary Questions), emphasizing budgetary processes in the face of diminishing resources. A lively question-and-answer and discussion session followed. The Chairman, on behalf of the Subcommittee, thanked Mr. Leslie, concluding that it had been a very useful coverage of a topical matter, one of great interest and concern to members of the Subcommittee.

Notes

[1] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 4*, para. 55.

[2] Ibid., para. 61.

[3] Ibid., para. 81 (b).

[4] Ibid., para. 96.

[5] Ibid., para. 75 (b).

[6] Ibid., para. 50.

[7] Ibid., para. 34 (a).

[8] Ibid., para. 100 (c).

[9] Elected for a second term of two years.

Annex

List of participants

United Nations entities and programmes

United Nations Statistics Division

Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)

Economic Commission for Europe

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Economic Commission for Africa

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

United Nations Children's Fund

United Nations Population Fund

United Nations Drug Control Programme

United Nations Environment Programme

Specialized agencies and related organization

International Labour Organization

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

World Health Organization

World Bank

International Monetary Fund

United Nations Industrial Development Organization

Inter-agency bodies

ACC Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (Financial and Budgetary Questions)

Other inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations

Inter-American Development Bank

Inter-State Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

Statistical Office of the European Communities

World Tourism Organization

World Trade Organization